

rather, as a parody of that culture, as a type of Disneyland which actually treated his clientele with condescension instead of paying homage?" (GILL, Brendon: *Many Masks. A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1987, ps. 479-480). Besides being condescending (which other authors have corroborated, such as TWOMBLY, Robert C.: *Frank Lloyd Wright. An Interpretative Biography*, Harper & Row, New York, 1973, p. 262) Wright referred to Iraq sarcastically, and even insultingly, despite his declared devotion to Mesopotamia, as expressed in the text "A Journey to Baghdad" (PFEIFFER, Bruce Brooks (ed.): *Frank Lloyd Wright. His Living Voice*, The Press at California State University, Fresno, 1987, ps. 50-52). Of course, in that article Wright also happily manipulates certain historical facts: he considers that the Assyrians preceded the Egyptians (*ibid.*, p. 50).

3. BERNDTSON, Indira, WILLIAMS, Greg: Interviews with William Wesley Peters, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1991, video, and text transcription by Indira Berndtson, p. 10, Wright Foundation, Taliesin. Document found and sent by Octavio Learco Borgatello
4. Typed letter from Olga Lazovich, third wife of Frank Lloyd Wright, to the Prime Minister Abdul Karim El-Kassem, after the coup, in which she reminds the Prime Minister of everything her husband did for Iraq (the designs and the long trip to Baghdad) without receiving any payment. The document was found in the Wright Foundation, Taliesin, and sent by Octavio Learco Borgatello.

## UNIVERSITY CAMPUS OF BAGHDAD (1957-)

### Walter Gropius, TAC and Hisham A. Munir

Walter Gropius and his office, TAC (The Architects' Collaborative), received the commission for the new university of Baghdad, secular, which was to differ from the religious one that had already existed until that point (the Al-alBait University). "It is unusual in the career of an architect", commented Gropius, "that he is given an opportunity to design a large complex of buildings on virgin ground, where one may establish the relation between the size and all the elements of the location, maintaining complete control over the design of every detail" (TAC: *The Heritage of Walter Gropius, Process Architecture* 19 (1980), p. 26).

The location was situated on the outskirts of the city (even though now, due to urban sprawl, it stands at the heart of the capital), close to the Tigris River; a mythical place, without a doubt: two of the rivers of Eden joined at this point. The initial project was conceived of by Gropius. An initial design was approved in February 1959, and a definitive version one year later. The turbulent political situation at the end of the fifties and during the seventies set back construction: at the beginning of the seventies, only the tower and the arch (whose gap at the highest point symbolizes the endlessness of existence of

the entry way, or according to another interpretation, open-mindedness) had been put up.

It was soon noted that the project was insufficient for the rising importance of the university. Trying to follow Gropius' directions (he passed away in 1969), the TAC and Hisham A. Munir expanded many times, and took the project up again, which had been continued through the seventies and eighties. Even nowadays, the "campus" (with centers along the river), the largest of all the Middle East, which already welcomes 55,000 students spread out through 273 buildings (classrooms, administrative necessities, dorms for men and for women, sports complexes etc.) has not been completed, even though the original guidelines of the project were maintained, and the university is still standing (despite the currently violent situation as of November, 2007, which influences daily work and classes, with a tight schedule, restricted at times to avoid danger, forced evacuations of class at four in the afternoon, and an uncertain number of professors and students, due to kidnappings, killings, and the growing exile).

At the end of the fifties, the university was made up of three branches: engineering (which included architecture), the sciences, and humanities. Today, only the sciences and engineering/architecture remain (the schools of engineering, sciences and physical education, as well as various research centers), since art and humanities, medicine and agriculture have been relocated to other parts of the city, and the university dorms were either closed or reduced in number in the eighties due to revolts in the male residences, have been given over to a new university, originally called Saddam, and now al-Nahrain.

"The basic concept lies in the balance between unity and diversity, integration and differentiation which offers the students both the intellectual and emotional experience of both the West and the East", Gropius wrote about the original project<sup>1</sup>. The plan called for a triple ringed form, able to accommodate, in three successive phases, a population of 5,000, then 8,000, and finally 12,000 students, around a central area, formally conceived of as a Mosque, in which would also have an open plaza which would contrast with the low, massive size of the library (planned to house a million books and 2,750 people). This was all to be situated behind the skyscrapers, the auditorium, a large, low multi-purpose building (with a natural science museum, art gallery, theater, and student center<sup>2</sup>), and a tall building that was reminiscent of (or symbolized) a minaret. The original project called for a small mosque, "traditionally" designed, rectangular, with a patio, and covered by a

bulbous dome. Behind, it was to have one single dome over the floor (this semi spherical building/dome was substituted by a more complex parabolic section. In the end, the mosque was not constructed in the original location, and the original design of a dome supported by three points was not followed either. Perhaps because of the typology chosen, a domed mosque, the building was never used as a place of worship). A second ring was to house the separate student dorms, and the third was to house athletic facilities (the stadium originally proposed by Gropius was never built, and was replaced by a sports complex).

The windows of the classrooms face north and south, and water should have run through some tiles and walls (but in fact only runs through the floor) to lower the temperature. The preoccupation for protecting against the climate (light and temperature) in Iraq was so important that it was the central topic of discussion in the two conferences that Gropius gave in the Society of Engineers and North American embassy. All the buildings were built close together in order to shade one another, and were organized around patios with fountains and ponds to avoid having to be under the harsh sun, which constituted a big change in the way Gropius planned the project. He found himself „confronted with “the qualities of lightness, slimness and linearity, apparently proceeding from the first European influences, from Gropius himself as well as Bauhaus (...), the University of Baghdad was an inflection point, considering the mass, center of gravity, and size, the opposite of linearity. A large part of this esthetic change was attributed to being in response to the climate of Baghdad, and the need to be protected from the sun...” (CURRIE, Leonard J. and Virginia M.: “TAC: Principles, Process and Product”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 44). The project underwent alterations, additions and substitutions, due to Hisham A. Munir. Various buildings designed by Gropius were not built, and, according to Al Tai (who is very critical of Munir’s work), only the tallest building was constructed following the original plans, and was incorporated in 1959 upon the express request of the new president<sup>3</sup>.

#### Notes

- 1 From the project memoirs, sent by Hisham Al Madfaai from Baghdad.
- 2 “Planning the University of Baghdad”, *Architectural Record*, February, 1961, ps. 110, 112-113, and 115.
- 3 MAREFAT, Mina: “Bauhaus in Baghdad. Walter Gropius Master Project for Baghdad University”, *Docomomo*, 35, September, 2006, p. 84.

## POLICE HEADQUARTERS, PALACE OF JUSTICE, PROPERTY REGISTER (CIVIC CENTER) (1957-1959)

Willem Marinus Dudok

In 1958, Dudok sent a letter to *Time* magazine complaining that in the recently published article, “New Lights for Alladin”<sup>1</sup>, dedicated to the work of great Western architects in Baghdad, the authors ignored the projects being carried out in the Iraqi capital<sup>2</sup>. His complaint, however, could have been extended until actuality<sup>3</sup>. The three projects that Dudok designed, though did not build, in the Civic Center of Baghdad (planned by the English firm of Minoprio, Spencely and P. W. Macfarlane, who also designed the General Plan for Baghdad), are hardly mentioned today, while Aalto’s design (Fine Arts Museum, and the Post and Telegraph Office), located in the same center, which were not built either, are more often mentioned.

The choice of Dudok (by the *Development Board*, and in Dudok’s own words), may surprise some, given that at the end of the fifties he was already advanced in age, and was not the most well known European architect, especially when compared with Le Corbusier, Aalto, and Doxiadis (in those years), but his experience in large municipal and state buildings may have been a determining factor in his being named for the project<sup>4</sup>.

The *Development Board* assigned him three buildings: The General Police Headquarters, the Palace of Justice, and the Property Register and General Settlement Headquarters. These three buildings were to be built where the authors of the design indicated, in the upper area of the Civic Center, next to Aalto’s buildings.

Even though the relationship between the Iraqi government and Dudok began tensely (the government was surprised that Dudok’s first response to the commission was not to inquire, like the rest of the architects, about the fee he would receive), Dudok accepted the job in February of 1957, and traveled to Baghdad in April.

The three projects were designed quickly, even though they were confronted by changes in the plan which incorporated new functions and increased security regulations, and they had to be revised many times after the coup d’état (“Things are rather complicated in Baghdad”, Dudok wrote to Minoprio in September of 1959). Moreover, the plans seemed to arrive “at a dead end”, as the Dutch architect explained in a letter to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing in December, 1962. Since then, correspondence was interrupted.